

**Ray Berry** and his wife Sonja have been associated with the Vedanta Society of New York since the 1960s. Later, the family resided adjacent to the Olema, CA Vedanta retreat, and Ray was also a regular visitor at the Trabuco, CA monastery. He is the author of *The Spiritual Athlete: A Primer for the Inner Life*.

Although I have little to offer, what I *do* remember is Swami Aseshananda sitting very quietly (almost in a corner as it were) at the Vedanta Society of New York in the 1960s visiting Swami Pavitrananda with other swamis.

When Swami Aseshananda came to NYC for Pavitrananda's memorial service (November 1977), I went with a friend, Stanley Quinn, to pick Swami up at the airport. Stanley asked me how we would recognize Swami A. I just laughed.

Sure enough there was no problem! Here comes this frumpy looking old man in an overcoat, winter cap with the "flaps down," curly hair billowing out beneath the cap, and a suitcase tied up with a rope, so it wouldn't pop open.

When we arrived at the center, Swami Tathagatananda pushed me up the stairs behind Swami Aseshananda and told me to "help" him get settled and show him around Swami Pavitrananda's room. I knew it well since I was Swami Pavitrananda's *sevak* (personal attendant) for many years.

On the way to the airport, we were all packed into our old Dodge Dart. I was up front with Swami A next to me, in the middle Swami T riding shotgun, and in back were Pr.Dhyana-prana, now in Hollywood convent, and 3 of my kids. As we neared JFK airport, we had a flat tire (having hit an horrendous pothole at high speed a few miles back which filled the whole car with "dust"). I pulled over on the grass (we were running very late) and started barking orders to my kids about jacking up the car, etc. and particularly told Tathagatananda to stay put and *not* get out. You must picture that this was an Indianapolis 500-style tire change as we were very late and Dhyana-prana also had to catch a flight.\*\*

Well, as we got the car jacked up very high, Tathagatananda opens the front door to get out. Boy did I blast him (we've always been good friends). Tire changed, Dhyana-prana pushed out of the car and if I remember rightly, she had to lug her suitcase a long way to get to her terminal. Then we pull up in front of Swami A's terminal, and as far as I remember he didn't even look back. And of course, not a peep out of him the whole time!

In 1995, perhaps after visiting my dear friend Swami Lokeshwarananda in Vancouver, my wife and I stopped by the Portland center. Swami Aseshananda was blind by then, and some of the folks there were on "edge," as it were. But Swami came downstairs and greeted Sonja and me with a thunderous "Welcome, welcome!" There seemed to be a sigh of relief from the assembled "devotees." [Editorial note: When asked about the reason for this sigh of relief, the contributor explained that Swami Aseshananda was noted for blasting people.]

\*\* Dhyana-prana recalled this event and wrote: “When we got to the airport Ray told me he would be right back to take me to my terminal as they went off with Swami Aseshananda. We were parked across from the departing flights in some kind of no-man’s land. Since I was anxious to get to my flight on time I walked across the divider and on to my terminal. As I remember it was not too far across the way. I was very grateful to Ray for the memorable trip to the airport with two holy men.”

*Ray Berry’s contribution was accidentally omitted from the first (print) edition; it was added to the second edition in ca. 2018.*